MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. McCone 26 March 1962

With reference to the first paragraph of your note of 9 March (attached), the specific drone referred to in the Los Angeles Times is Radio Plane SD-1. It has a 100 to 125 mile range at about 175 miles per hour at 10,000 - 12,000 feet altitude. It could be launched and retrieved by a surface vessel. The SD-1 can carry either motion picture or still camera. However, the British Army considers it so vulnerable that it will be used for training purposes only.

We as an Agency have not made any extensive study of the use of drones for deep or medium reconnaissance penetrations. The Army, however, has gone into this to a considerable extent in connection with their interest in battlefield reconnaissance.

A brief review of the drones potentially available for reconnaissance reveals that the only vehicle that might be made ready in an acceptable time period is the Fairchild SD-5, which is now under development. It is a subsonic turbojet powered by a Pratt-Whitney J-60 engine and is capable of flying 750 to 3000 miles depending on the altitude selected from sea level to 50,000 feet. It is steered by an inertial guidance system. It has adequate space and weight capacity for an aerial camera with useful resolution. The drone could be launched by surface vessel or from an aircraft with recovery made at sea.

In short, this is a possibility into which I should like to look further, with specific reference to the Kamchatka requirement. It is not possible to make a firm prediction now, but I should think a reasonable estimate of feasibility and timing could be made after perhaps two weeks study into what appear to be the major problem areas: (a) system reliability; (b) vulnerability; and (c) operational considerations. I will advise further when this quick study is completed.

You may be interested to know that after the 1 May 1960 incident, consideration was given to the possibility of developing a drone version of the U-2. Kelly Johnson studied this suggestion intensively and concluded that primarily

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because of the light stressing of the aircraft and its narrow performance envelope, it could not be a successful drone without the expenditure of about 18 months development and flight test time and several million dollars for the additional equipment alone. Even then, he predicted that the loss rate at the required operational ranges might well be as high as 50%. Given these dismal predictions, no further investigation was undertaken.

Attachment:
Memorandum from
Mr. McCone, dated
9 March 1962

/s/
HERBERT SCOVILLE, JR.
Deputy Director
(Research)

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cc: DPD
TSD [redacted]

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#4-DD/R Projects Chrono